

Full interview of Muslim Shishani with Muhammad Jazira, October/November 2017



Translated into English by

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Translator's foreword

The following text is an English translation of an interview given by Muslim Shishani, the amir of the Junud al-Sham jamaat, to the independent Russian-speaking media activist Muhammad Jazira over October and November 2017.

I have decided to publish it in full because I believe that this will help aid understanding not only of Muslim and his position on Syria and the current situation there, but of the wider position of foreign fighters vis-à-vis the Syrian conflict. As I say on my site, it is my belief that understanding the various foreign fighter groups in Syria is key to a deeper understanding not only of the conflict in that country, but also of other conflicts around the world, including those in these fighters' countries of origin. In this way, by gathering information over time, we can see how these conflicts are interconnected, and how one affects the other. By avoiding discussing these questions, by avoiding examining these groups, by avoiding understanding them, or also by oversimplifying them or making assumptions based on what we would like to be true, and by avoiding knowledge about these groups' motivations and beliefs, we are only reducing our ability to make sense of and address important issues that lead to war, conflict and displacement of peoples. So I would rather attempt to seek out

complicated, messy truths that have to be constantly updated and amended with new information, than be satisfied with superficial knowledge.

Obviously, the opinions expressed by Muslim Shishani in his interview are his alone and by my translating them and disseminating them in the hope of increasing understanding, I am not making any claim to share them in any way. (It is very sad that I have to make this clear.)

A few points about the interview:

- Muhammad Jazira conducted this interview, not me. Credit for the interview should go to him. Credit for this translation should go to me.
- Muslim wrote the interview in Russian, which is his third language after Chechen and Georgian. So there are constructions in the Russian that are peculiar to him or which sound particularly "Chechen" or "North Caucasian" and these are reflected in the translation.
- In the interview, Muslim talks about "we" and "us" to refer to the mujahidin, i.e. those fighters in Syria who consider

themselves to be waging jihad there, rather than to his specific jamaat.

- Muslim refers to jihad to mean "fighting in the path of Allah" on the battlefield, and not to carrying out violent attacks against civilians in Western or other countries i.e. terrorism. You will note that Muslim discusses this issue in the interview. It is important not to conflate foreign fighters in Syria, even those who consider their actions as jihad, with those calling for acts of terrorism. We need to understand things within their actual contexts.
- For me, one of the most interesting aspects of this interview is the comparison Muslim makes between his experiences fighting in Chechnya and the situation there, and with the current situation in Syria. I have written quite a lot on how foreign fighters/mujahidin like Muslim and others see their role in Syria and how they seek to integrate into society in that country, both politically, militarily and socially.
- I have translated the term муджахиды as mujahidin, rather than using the term "militant" (which is politically loaded) or "fighter".

Muhammad Jazira: First of all, please tell us about your jamaat: who are you and who are your scholars? It has been said that you are linked to Al Qaeda, is this indeed the case?

Muslim Shishani: What I am going to say now will probably sound very strange in these times. I don't call myself by such names as *Ahlus-Sunnah wa'l-Jama'ah*¹, Salafist or something else. And I don't consider myself as part of one stream or another. Also, I am not and never have been Al Qaeda or any other group. I am simply a Muslim from Chechnya, who came to help my brothers and sisters in faith during their time of troubles. I would like to explain my views about these divisions.

As far as our knowledge of religion goes, there are Muslims and non-Muslims. And among the Muslims there are those who have gone astray over certain issues. These people existed during the lifetime of the Prophet, and even more misguided people emerged after his death. But at that time, all these people were called Muslims until they did something that put them beyond Islam. These days, it is not so easy to be simply a Muslim who adheres to the way of the Prophet. At home, the Sufis deemed us Wahhabis, the Islamic State consider us to be apostates, some consider us *Murji'ites*², there are those who consider [us] *Khawarij*

¹ A term for Sunni Islam

² A term taken from the name for an early school of Islam that, in contrast to the Kharijites (see below), believed that only God has the authority to determine who is a real Muslim and who is not.

³. And since we do not adhere to any group we constantly experience pressure from these groups. This is how it is: if you are a member of these groups, then even if you are the worst Muslim, to them you will be the best, even better than the best Muslim who is not a member of these groups. The *Hadith* where it says that the best before Allah is he who fears Allah the most, works only within discrete jamaats.

I think that these streams, these names, by which we identify ourselves among Muslims and try to emphasize our special position in the Islamic *Ummah*⁴, is our common misfortune. Praise be to Allah, no matter what anyone says, I know my path and I follow it without paying any heed to all of that. But imagine the situation for weak Muslims who do not quite understand these divisions, or the position of a Christian who converted to Islam. Is it not enough for an unbeliever to say the *shahada*⁵ and observe the *fard*⁶ to become a Muslim? From the *ayat*⁷ and the *Hadith* we know that it is sufficient. But do we let him be free, without tying him to any stream or group? What will he do under this pressure?

³ A term taken from a Muslim school of thought from the first century of Islam whose adherents were considered particularly extremist. Islamic State have often been referred to as Khawarij, in particular because of their practice of declaring some Muslims as unbelievers (takfir).

⁴ The global community of Muslims

⁵ The Muslim profession of faith

⁶ A religious duty commanded by God (فرض)

⁷ Verses of the Quran

When we impose all sorts of names and streams on Muslims, we unconsciously divide this *Ummah* into parts, and that is why it is easy for infidels today to manage the one and a half billion strong *Ummah*. They can easily incite different streams against each other, who, start killing each other after accusing one another of apostasy or delusion, which is what we are witnessing today.

I often wonder why we are so disjointed. After all, we have the One Allah, there is one religion, and the Messenger, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, who brought us this religion is one, and the book of Allah is one. And Allah commands us not to divide. I understand that there are enemies of Islam who desire that there be no unity among Muslims, and they, using the hypocrites among us, divide the weak Muslims into different sects. But these are not the ones I am talking of here.

I want to discuss the reasons why sincere Muslims who understand religion and who really desire the rise of Islam are divided. The main reason I have found among the scholars, and then among the *amirs*⁸ of jihad, who create different groups and assign different names to them.

I know many may disagree with me about what I'm going to say. If they say that the scholars know religion better than us, they will

⁸ Commanders

be right. I have not lost respect for scholars and I understand that they are the heirs of the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, and that, because of the sincere among them, this religion will endure until the Day of Judgment. Every scholar who protects even one *Sunnah* from our religion is dear to me. But he who builds knows how much easier it is to destroy, therefore among the scholars there are also those who divide us. If we are not scholars, this does not mean that we have no right to reflect and seek the causes of our disunity and eliminate them whenever possible. After all, these troubles have touched all of us.

If we look at the roots of our religion, it is easy to find where discrepancies arise. For example, if scholars talk about the *ayat* and how the Prophet and then the *Sahaba*⁹ and the *Tabi'un*¹⁰ interpreted them then the scholars have no disagreements. It is the same when they talk about the *Hadith* and how these were explained by the *Sahaba* and the *Tabi'un*, and when they tell stories about the *Sahaba* and *Tabi'un*. But this is the last time that the opinions of the scholars converge. Thereupon begins a dark forest. Because after this, scholars begin to rely on indirect evidence. One scholar thinks this, and a second scholar thinks something else, while a third thinks quite differently, etc., and

⁹ The Companions, i.e. those who were with the Prophet Muhammad – usually those who believed in him and died as Muslims.

¹⁰ The generation who came after the Sahaba

each of them tries to gather more like-minded people, imposing their opinion on them. Sometimes this results in enmity and hatred for each other.

I always thought: what would have happened if the scholars had not crossed over that line from where there is direct evidence, after which their opinions began to diverge? Would we have lost something? After all, Allah in the last *ayat* that he sent down says that he had completed the religion for us! It was completed when the Prophet was still alive and does not need further additions. The Prophet said that he had brought everything to us, and that after him people would add to this religion, that these were innovations, and innovations were to be rejected. At the beginning of each *khutbah*¹¹ we are reminded of this.

But all these names and divisions are innovations. And if these innovations divide us, the Muslims, and lead to enmity with each other, is not this a sufficiently great sin for us to discard them? There are well known cases when the *Sahaba* discarded some of the *Sunnahs* to avoid a split in the ranks of the Muslims. Thus, Abu Dawud¹² narrated the words of Abdur Rahman bin Yazid¹³

¹¹ Public sermon

¹² Abu Dawud Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath al-Azdi as-Sijistani, b. 817 CE, the author of a collection of some 4,800 hadith.

¹³ Narrated 'Abdur Rahman bin Yazid: We offered a four Rakat prayer at Mina behind Ibn 'Affan. 'Abdullah bin Masud was informed about it. He said sadly, "Truly to Allah we belong and truly to Him we shall return." And added, "I prayed two Rakat with Allah's Apostle at Mina and similarly with Abu Bakr and with 'Umar (during their

that Uthman performed a prayer of four *rak'ahs*¹⁴ in Mina and Abdullah [bin Mas'ud] said: "I performed a two *rakah* prayer with the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, with Abu Bakr and Umar." In one of the versions this is added: "And Uthman at the beginning of his caliphate, and then he began praying the full prayer." And Hafs added the words of Abdullah [bin Mas'ud]: "And I performed four *rak'ahs* behind Uthman [ibn Affan], bringing the *namaz*¹⁵ after him to the end." Muawiyah bin Qurrah recounted from the words of his teachers that when Abdullah prayed four *rak'ahs*, people told him: "You reproached Uthman, and then he himself performed four *rak'ahs*." In response, he said: "Disagreements are evil" (Al-Bukhari and Muslim, Hadith Sahih).

Is what was revealed during the 23 years during which the Prophet transmitted this religion to us not enough? The Prophet warned people not to ask him unnecessary questions, as a result of which new requirements might appear. Muslim narrates a Hadith, in which it is reported that Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas¹⁶, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Truly, the greatest sin

caliphates)." He further said, "May I be lucky enough to have two of the four Rakat accepted (by Allah)."

<http://www.al-hadi.us/religion/research/companions/10.html>

¹⁴ A single unit of prayer

¹⁵ The five daily prayers (in Russian they are known as namaz, which is the Turkish term, they are also called salah)

¹⁶ One of the Companions

against Muslims is committed by that Muslim who asked a question about something not forbidden to Muslims and afterwards it was declared forbidden because of his question." Also, the Messenger of Allah said: "Do not ask me about that which I did not mention! Truly, those who lived before you perished only because they asked a lot of questions and did not agree with their prophets, and therefore, if I tell you something, then do it from what you are able, if I forbid you anything, then refrain from it!" What would have happened if the scholars had simply explained to us the verses and hadiths, as understood by the *Sahaba* and *Tabi'un*, and confined themselves to this without adding their opinions?

We used to have a source of water on the outskirts of the village that came from the mountain, and all the people went there to get water for drinking, even though there was a water pipe in each house in the village. I have never in my life saw anyone get water anywhere along its course, they always went to the source. I remember when I was young, I was too lazy to go to the source and decided to get water along the way, but when I looked, I saw that some small creatures were swimming there, and realized it was not good for drinking.

I believe that if we all take knowledge from the source, then we will have no reason for divisions. There is always purity at the

source, and later on the rubbish inevitably appears. Therefore, scholars need to teach young people that which has come to us via reliable paths from the first generations of Muslims, and they should not cross that line, and they should use the words:

"nothing has reached us about this," without resorting to their judgements to answer. After all, in everything that Allah has commanded us, there is a great wisdom that our brains are not able to grasp, except in part. We must be satisfied that we, as far as possible, comply with these commands. Can the *Sahaba*, who lived with the Prophet, and today's scholars, between whom there are 1400 years, understand or judge in exactly the same way?

Today, this religion has been driven into such narrow corridors, and there are so many of these corridors, that one gets lost in them. And today, to be recognized as a Muslim, it is not enough to say the *shahada*, not commit *shirk*¹⁷ and *kufr*¹⁸, and observe the *fard*. This is followed by a lot of questions, especially among young people: do you recognize this or that as *kufr*; which *jamaat* you prefer; whether you support certain streams, etc. And if they do not like one of your answers, then at the very least they will avoid you.

¹⁷ Idolatry or polytheism

¹⁸ Disbelief

It has reached the point where a young Muslim, who comes to Jihad in a Muslim country, has no idea how to treat a person there who does not wear a beard or turn up his trousers [above the ankle], let alone those who smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol. I'm not talking about big sins. He thinks that when he comes to Islam, he cannot turn to the right or left without knowing what the scholars are saying about it, and he begins to behave at the very least incomprehensibly with weak Muslims, which is why he sets them against himself. After all, they do not only not behave according to Islamic *adab*¹⁹ with these people but they also do not even show common respect for them, not only on Jihad but even at home their attitude toward their parents is changed.

This is because religion is transmitted to them incorrectly. After all, there are so many books today where the whole life of a person is painted in detail, even about things the Prophet did not talk in detail about. Today, religion has become so complicated that Muslims are afraid to give *salam*²⁰ to a someone they consider a doubtful Muslim, no less than they are to commit *shirk* or *kufr*.

But Islam is very simple, and it does not obligate someone to change his life completely. In Islam, everything you need to know

¹⁹ Etiquette

²⁰ Islamic greeting

is underlined, and in everything else Allah has given you a choice and you can act according to your conscience, avoiding what is doubtful. Live as you had lived, and do not lose your *adab* to anyone. Only observe the *fard*, having learned your religion, get rid of what is sinful and try wherever possible to adhere to the desirable, that is, the *Sunnah*. Have we not read about how the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa salam*²¹, respected his uncle, although he was a *mushrik*²²; or how he treated his neighbors, even the Jews? And how did he command that parents are to be treated, even if they are non-Muslims? Rigidity and courage are what we must demonstrate during the battle. The mercy of the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa salam*, always outstripped his punishment, even where his enemies were concerned.

MJ: You have been added to the terrorism list. What are your thoughts on that?

Muslim: The fact that I have been included on the list of terrorists isn't surprising, because for the unbelievers, any Muslim who takes up arms in order to defend himself or those close to him is a terrorist. The worst thing is that we, the Muslims, put these terrible

²¹ God bless him and grant him salvation, a standard phrase used by Muslims usually following the first mention of the Prophet Muhammad; Muslim uses it every time, sometimes in Arabic like here but other times he says it in Russian.

²² One who commits shirk, i.e. a polytheist

labels on ourselves, and we are even proud of them. In this way, we unconsciously help the unbelievers to wage war on us.

I would like young people to think about this, because they most of all need to clarify these matters.

The unbelievers have invested all of the concepts that are most hateful to humanity in the word "terrorist"—terrorists intimidate people by killing civilians, children and old people; terrorists do not know pity and enjoy people's suffering. A terrorist is a creature who hates everyone without discrimination, who can only destroy; terrorism must be eradicated even if innocent people suffer in doing so, in order to save the majority.

They linked this terrible word—and not without our help—to Islam, and we, Muslims, take this calmly, even though the consequences greatly affect our religion and the entire *Ummah*.

In order to understand these consequences, let's look briefly at the jihad in Syria. You probably understand very well what compassion the world showed, at the start of this jihad, towards the Syrians who were suffering at the hands of the *zaalim*²³ Assad. The world regarded him as the brutal murderer of his people and few countries sought to support him. If any of these governments, who were concerned about their authority among

²³ Evildoer

their people, went to support him, then their people might consider them to be *zaalims* as well. Therefore, Bashar was officially supported only by the Shi'ites, his co-religionists. Even Russia, which originally stood alongside this tyrant, was afraid to officially admit that it was giving him military support. Muslims from all over the world could peacefully give aid to Syria, to the people and to the mujahideen. The brothers who came here to support the Muslims were considered heroes by this *Ummah*, because everyone tried to come here even for a week. The Muslims slowly began to prevail. Our *Ummah*, which was everywhere under oppression, started to look at Syria with great hope.

Of course this did not go unnoticed by the enemies of this religion, who are afraid of the revival of Islam. They started to use age-old tricks to untie their hands.

We recall how the [Syrian] people went to demonstrations in support of Jabhat al-Nusra when America blacklisted that group. We recall how the *amirs* of the Free Syrian Army made an official statement saying that they would not allow the brothers to be divided. At that time the people and the mujahidin were united. The brothers who were here at the start of the jihad saw this.

But the enemies of Islam did not stop there, and they started to divide Muslims into good and bad. Regarding how this happened, I don't think we need to give much detail, as thinking people understood this very well. The easiest thing was to support the extremist Muslims who wanted to build a caliphate in a day, add to this well-trained and prepared agents who could occupy important positions in the new organization, and *voilà*, Baghdadi's Islamic State was secured. After that, they could simply call the tune. Then, the media, by demonstrating the "cruelty of the terrorists," changed their opinion about what was happening in Syria, and the hands of the unbelievers were untied.

And we see the results of this today. Right now, not only Bashar Assad, but also everyone who can be bothered, quietly bombs away, as much as possible [targeting] innocent people, women, children, old people are killed, but the world sees this as a necessary step. After all, people are intimidated by the fact that these monsters will come home from Syria to their countries of origin, and they will start killing them just as mercilessly, in their cities, in their homes. As proof of this possibility, the unbelievers use our youth, who do not realize what they are doing, to blow up peaceful people, and maybe they blow themselves up and blame the explosions on some Muslim they don't like, as has repeatedly

happened in some countries where the people hesitated and did not completely trust their leaders.

Today, the Muslims already have their hands tied. If someone decides to come here to help, then he has to understand that there is no way back for him, and few dare to do this. Few also dare to give financial assistance, because for this they are handed down long prison terms, or at least there is a risk that they will lose their business if they have one. Even just going to a rally against the bombing of civilians is dangerous, people can be arrested for supporting terrorists. They did not stop there, they began to oppress Muslims in their countries, accusing them of having links with terrorists, arresting people just for words in support of the Mujahidin; they close mosques, ban external signs of Islam. Moreover, because of what is happening, the unbelievers who used to join Islam in droves also weakened. The leaders of the unbelievers justify all of this by the fact that we, the Mujahidin exist, calling us terrorists.

What are we doing to change this situation? From many people you only hear the words: "We don't care what the unbelievers say about us, the main thing is that Allah sees our intentions and deeds." Is Jihad conducted with weapons alone? Did not we read in the Qur'an how Allah ordered the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): "They say so and so, tell them ..." - when

the *mushriks* began to slander the Prophet or to spread various tales about Islam tales to turn people away from it. The Prophet constantly cleansed himself of the distorted representations that were attributed to him. If one of us is said to have the wrong orientation, we will start throwing thunder and lightning, so why is it that we do not do so for Islam? This is not even about the youth, because the *amirs*, the scholars and the authoritative people of the groups who have been labeled as terrorists should care about this first and foremost. Why is everything so disorganized? Why are we, those who came out to help this *ummah* and alleviate its situation, complicating things even more?

After all, it is not only the *ummah* that suffers because of this, but we find also ourselves with our hands tied. In the first place, those groups that are supported by righteous finances²⁴ suffer. After all, money is the engine of Jihad. And if there is not enough to feed the youth, Jihad will slowly die out.

We must take into account the weakness of the position of the *Ummah*, when there are so few who decide to support us financially ["with their property"]. There are few who remember the *Sharia*, according to which first of all one has to set right the situation in one's own home, so that it serves as an example for

²⁴ He means donations.

the rest, and then only afterwards go out and instruct [others]. We are ready to blame the whole world for our sins, but we do not want to admit our mistakes. I understand that whatever we do, the unbelievers will come up with new intrigues against us, but we should not help them by giving them extra reasons—on the contrary, we should fight against this as much as possible.

I am not going to answer the question of whether our actions are prohibited or allowed in *Sharia*, for that there are scholars who are qualified to solve these issues, I'm talking about harm and benefit.

I want to say this briefly about myself: I was never a terrorist and always hated terrorists, whoever they were. In Chechnya, I fought against those who terrorized my people, who killed both the strong and the weak, including women, children and the elderly, in order to subjugate them by intimidation. Here in Syria I fight against those who are terrorizing this people in the same way. I've never been a criminal, I've always been cautious of injustice and have always hated cruelty, even against the enemy. This is my path, from which I will not be forced to swerve by any insult, because I represent the religion of Allah.

MJ: What is the current situation in Syria as a whole and what future prospects for jihad do you see?

Muslim: The situation in Syria is of course not the best, and everyone is clearly aware of this, both those on the inside and those who are on the outside. This is despite the fact that Allah has given us everything that we could have dreamed of: there are many scholars, there are many experienced people, there are many Mujahidin; weapons; territory where we can organize and maneuver; there are nearby states with an Islamic population, from where much help could come if relations were to be established correctly. And though the whole world has gathered against us, Allah has sown great disagreements between the unbelievers, so that two states can't get along with each other fully. If they agree on one point, then there are always disagreements over another. And some states are very interested in the people getting the upper hand over the *zaalim* Bashar, and they extend a helping hand.

Meanwhile we get weaker and weaker. The reason is clear to any person who can think and understand religion. And not just to experienced people, even when you ask the youth whether they understand why we are getting weaker and they immediately reply, BECAUSE OF DISAGREEMENTS.

There are disagreements among the mujahidin in everything: in religious views, in political views, and worst of all in the military sphere.

There is only one thing we agree on—that we have already reached the abyss. We are aware that everyone who has some interest in strengthening Islam will fall into this abyss. Many already consider this inevitable and so they are looking for ways to cushion the fall. Some are ready to accept the conditions of the unbelievers, just to retain at least some position and not to get on their bad side. Some are already leaving, having quit Jihad. Some people are thinking about where they can go with their group in order to continue Jihad, if everything goes on like this; and many continue, still hoping for the help of Allah and trusting in Him, but at the same time they do not change their position in the least.

One wants to go out and shout loudly: hey people, stop, open your eyes and see where you're heading!!! In turning away from the good that Allah has given us, you are following the path that will lead us to shame and humiliation. Come to your senses! After all, we are not only making things worse for ourselves. History will remember us as those who, because of their passions, drowned the *ummah* in the mud from which it only had only just begun to extricate itself. Are you not afraid that the next generation, after reading our history, instead of making *dua*²⁵ for us, will curse us? Let's stop and fix the situation.

²⁵ Supplication

But in order to fix something, you must first understand your mistakes.

I would like to dwell on this a bit to discuss this matter and show what our mistakes consist of. Of course, one can talk about this for a very long time, but I will try to be as brief as possible.

First, and most importantly, how can we achieve unity? After all, we understand that no matter how hard we try, what use our affairs.

There are two ways to achieve unity. The first is by means of justice. But this way is very difficult, because one needs to give up one's passions, and this is not something everyone can do, for this a person must be very God-fearing.

If the Sharia is not in force in full among the Muslims, then power begins to operate and injustice occurs; if there is injustice, then disagreements arise; disagreements eventually turn into enmity, and in the end chaos ensues. For there not to be chaos, some kind of law needs to be in force among the people. And since Muslims do not recognize any law except the law of Allah, then if the law of Allah is not in operation or is operating only partially, chaos is inevitable.

After all, not everyone will put up with a situation where the law applies to some but not to others; eventually, a power will arise out of the oppressed to oppose the main power. Thus revolutions occur. In order for such chaos to not arise, justice is needed, and justice can occur only when everyone, without exception, from the caliph to the last Muslim, is subject to an independent Sharia court. Then those with power will think a hundred times whether it is worth acting unjustly. Unity among Muslims, when achieved in this way, is strong and lasting.

But there is another, easier, way—via power, if such exists. But this will work only as long as there is power, as long as the powerful ones do not weaken or until another power emerges to support the oppressed. As soon as one does appear, the collapse of this system is inevitable. We have seen plenty of examples of this in history. This is a very unsteady path.

Second: foreign policy. Even if all is well among the Muslims, foreign policy also must be conducted correctly. An incorrect foreign policy can increase the hostility of those with whom it is currently undesirable to feud, and even turn well-wishers into enemies; at the end of the day, one can collect so many enemies around oneself that their onslaught crushes everything. Proper policy always makes the military's situation easier, while under an

incorrect policy, the military can never rest. Politicians should always proceed from *Sharia* and from their military capabilities.

Third: the military aspect. Even the most powerful and well-equipped army can become a useless force in the hands of unskillful commanders, which cannot then protect even itself, let alone a country. I once heard the elders say: "An army of sheep, if it is led by a lion, is better than an army of lions commanded by a ram." And in history there are many examples when skillful commanders achieved victory over an enemy that was many times its superior.

Now, based on the above, let us assess the current situation.

Sharia is only partially in force here. We have established *Sharia* courts, which everyone must obey. But there is a category of people who do not submit to these courts. These are those who have the power, it is simply impossible for an ordinary Muslim to elicit anything from them. But they can pick up anyone at any time of the day and night and punish him without trial. I understand that they have their reasons and justifications, and there are *Sharia* scholars who support them, but to me as a simple Muslim these reasons are incomprehensible.

From the history of the Prophet and the righteous caliphs, I learned a completely different approach to this. Maybe I am

wrong in accusing them of anything—but in that case the majority of this [Syrian] people, who also understand these reasons, are also mistaken. In Chechnya, if an *Amir* or a *Mujahid* refused to solve problems according to the Sharia, then without having knowledge of the religion as it is known here, we immediately accused him of being an unbeliever, as we read the *ayat* and judged on these *ayat*. People could turn their backs on this *Amir* or *Mujahid*. Therefore, we did not have such problems among the *Mujahidin*. There were problems among civilians: if we wanted to take one of them to the *Sharia* court, then his *teip*²⁶ or even all the Sufis would stand up for him.

And in politics, of course, we managed to really mess things up²⁷ so much so that even the rulers of the states who hated Bashar, have now, foaming and gnashing their teeth, united with him against us. Openly supporting us, as I said in my previous answer, has become dangerous for everyone. Even the moderate groups with which these states tried to maintain at least some relations showed themselves to be weak and indecisive²⁸: they rushed to wherever the pressure was strongest; first to Geneva, and then to Astana. If tomorrow someone else starts to pressure

²⁶ A Vaynakh (Chechen and Ingush) tribal structure

²⁷ Muslim uses a rather slangy word, набардачить, which comes from бардак (a mess, also a brothel), and is used a lot in Chechnya, North Caucasians in Syria use it too

²⁸ "очень низком уровне" — literally "a very low level" but he means they are weak and indecisive

them more, then they will ditch everything and run there. There is no specific clear position and, having understood this, the unbelievers know where to apply pressure.

The military situation is no better for us. But I want to talk about this separately, since the brothers have asked a lot of questions related to this.

All this is despite the fact that, as I said, we have been given everything that Jihad could dream of: scholars, experienced politicians, military people, and a well-equipped army, we do not have leaders who could organize all this correctly and lead them in the right direction.

MJ: Do you think that the mujahideen need to make changes to the military strategy that they use in this war?

Muslim: Of course, both our strategy and our tactics require drastic changes. It is impossible to continue fighting the way we are now, as the loss of Aleppo has finally shown. Although even before that it had become clear that everything needed to change. The world has long surpassed the level of strategy and tactics that we have today. Up until now our tactics have been based on brute force. At the beginning of the jihad in Syria, this tactic worked, because the enemy's army was not in the best condition either. Our brothers, with their courage and fortitude, prevailed,

although the enemy was superior to us in terms of weapons and organization. But their organization is bearing fruit, and they slowly improved their army, taking on board the experience of Iranian and Russian specialists. We are still treading water, even though experienced military men came to help from all over the world, and we have plenty of them, without even taking into account the officers who defected from Bashar's army.

Once, I read the statement of a commander who compared the Mamluks and the French army. He said that one Mamluk is stronger than one French soldier, but ten French soldiers are stronger than ten Mamluks, because they know how to fight in an organized manner. The current situation very clearly illustrates this saying: although we are equal to the enemy in terms of number of soldiers, courage, fortitude, and purposefulness of the *Mujahidin*, we still began to lose to them, suffering great losses. This is all because during six years of jihad we were not able to create an organized army. Although we are waging a positional war, our current strategy is something between that of a guerrilla and a positional one. We are partisan detachments trying to lead a positional war. But partisan detachments are not able to conduct the protracted operations that are required for a positional war if one's aim is to wear down the enemy.

Usually it is not a problem for us to gather 3-5,000 *mujahidin* for any operation, because many jamaats respond to the call. However, deploying all these people does not work, because there is no organization. Therefore, the majority of the burden falls on a certain number of people, while the rest just wait. After a week or two, at most a month, everyone is tired—some physically and some morally—and the *mujahidin* slowly start to leave the operation. Over time there are not even enough people to keep the *ribats*²⁹. The enemy, having easily studied this weakness of ours, do not put up much resistance at first, because they know that they can't stop the *mujahidin* at this time. They simply slow us down with artillery and airplanes. Since we have large clusters of people, correspondingly there are a lot of martyrs and wounded, mostly from those who are waiting around. And later, when the unbelievers feel that our onslaught has weakened, they inflict their main blow and usually take not just those places that we recaptured, but more.

In order to change the situation, we must create an army where the military *amir* is able to control all of the fighters down to the last *mujahid*, even though he would have 10,000 soldiers under his command. We need to divide them in such a way that one section is operational, another section remains as backup, and

²⁹ Guard duty, usually on the frontiers of the territory captured by the rebels.

the others wait until they are required. By changing groups in this way, we would be able to wage war continuously for a long time and thus exhaust the enemy without exhausting the brothers [i.e. the *mujahidin*]. But, unfortunately, the enemy today uses this tactic against us, although they have fewer soldiers than us, if we are to believe the *amirs* of the groups.

I believe that the idea now widespread among the brothers that we need to switch to guerrilla tactics is an erroneous one. I agree organizing sabotage attacks is necessary, this is needed in any war to ease the situation of the main forces. But it would be a big mistake to focus on guerrilla tactics in our situation. First, our conditions are not right, either geographically or militarily. Second, we are not so weak as to resort to guerrilla warfare, we just need good military organizers. Third, since we have fronts, we can't use this tactic on our enemies, because it would crumble as soon as they began to advance. And we can't abandon the fronts, because if we leave the [Syrian] people without protection, we know what the Alawites will do to them. They are not Russians, or Americans, who in Chechnya or Afghanistan officially did not fight civilians, although many peaceful people suffered because of them. Remember Hama in 1982, when the Alawites killed more than 40,000 Muslims, not sparing even women and children.

Right here, right now we must wage a positional war, and Allah has given us all the conditions for this. Only we must weigh the pros and cons correctly, and following from this, develop a strategy and tactics. We need good knowledge of our strength and the strength and capabilities of the enemy. Here, the Russians' strategy and tactics are used, and hardly anyone knows them better than we Chechens. We could help reveal their strengths and weaknesses, but, first, unfortunately, very few people listen to us, and if we wanted to demonstrate this by example—our hands are tied; and second, even if anyone was interested in our experience, they are not military people, because this jihad is not led primarily by military people, and it is difficult for them to understand what we are talking about. It's as if someone went up to a surgeon and asked: "My brother has appendicitis, I want to remove it, explain to me how to do it." The surgeon explains, but is the person who is asking the question able to understand this explanation and carry out this operation properly without medical knowledge, even though it is not difficult for the expert? Meanwhile those who have knowledge are already carrying out heart transplants... And we want to defeat them without military experience. There are military men in each group, but they are not able to act using their knowledge and experience.

I will try to briefly explain what tactics I consider effective in our situation. This matter is not for the Internet, of course, but after all, there is no other way left, unfortunately. Maybe this way this will reach those who are able to influence the situation.

If we compare our capabilities with those of the enemy, then of course the enemy surpasses us in many ways, with training, and weapons, and the army, and air support, which we do not have, etc. But we have advantages in mobility, and second, without the support of artillery, their soldiers are weaker than us, i.e. to organize an operation against us, they need to bring a huge quantity of heavy weapons, distribute and arrange them correctly, mark out the whole territory where they want to operate, divide it into a grid, etc., and usually it takes them a lot of time. We can very easily take advantage of this time, since we are light; deploying our fighters and weapons to pickup trucks, we can send them to any point in our territory and strike a sudden blow quickly to destroy their plans, fortifying up ahead the points where they are preparing to attack.

And it's better, of course, not to wait until they do something, but to attack. When the forces are weaker, this is the best thing to do; the attacker always has more choices, he can choose the enemy's weak flank and the most advantageous time for himself. If necessary, as long as the enemy does not organize and put up

much resistance, he can withdraw without problems, i.e. he can impose his own rules.

If we look at the tactics of Khalid bin Walid — when a huge army of Byzantines gathered against him, he retreated to the desert and he met them there. Khalid had light cavalry, and the Byzantines were carrying heavy supplies, so if the fight was not in his favor, he could easily retreat into the desert, and the Byzantines could not pursue him because of their loads; he could also emerge in an unexpected place and attack them suddenly. The same tactics were used in the Caucasus against the Russian army by our grandfathers and great-grandfathers for 300 years. When the Russian army marched on the Caucasus, the *Mujahidin* did not wait until it reached them, but sent forward diversionary groups that unexpectedly attacked the enemy in the daytime, and at night in places where they had struck camp, or in narrow, hard-to-reach places, that is, where the *Mujahidin* had the advantage and where they were not expected. In the end, in many cases, either the army reached its destination already in disarray and was then easily beaten, or it turned around halfway, having lost many soldiers. In the end, the Russians captured the Caucasus, but with quantity, not with smarts, just as it did recently, in the Chechen war.

Based on the above, we must focus on mobility and surprise, so that the enemy does not have time to build cordons of artillery and aviation against us. After all, in battles, this is what is hindering us the most. To do this, first of all, we need to create an army that is ready to fight at any time of the day and night. And we have to organize this army, taking into consideration our combat capabilities. May Allah let us organize such an army that will establish peace and justice on this earth!

MJ: Today the Turkish army is already in Idlib, and, as we see, they are going to consolidate here, building up their troops. How do you think this will affect the course of Jihad?

Muslim: In answering this question, I do not claim that my judgments are without error, but as many brothers are asking me about it, I will try to briefly outline my view on this.

Right away I want to warn that I am not going to get into the *Sharia* side of things here, it's not in my competence, and besides, scholars have already said a great deal on the matter.

That Turkey and its government led by Erdogan is one of the most discussed topics in the world is beyond doubt. The enemies of Islam accuse them of wanting to revive the Ottoman Caliphate, and many Muslims have high hopes for them, and indeed, the

situation in Turkey has improved much compared to what it was before.

But we can only ask Allah, as the Prophet, asked for Umar, for Allah to strengthen this religion through them.

To answer the question, we must first understand what the interests of Turkey in Syria are, because any state puts its own interests first. We may not know everything, but we will consider what we do know.

First, Turkey has two problems that are related to Syria. The first and main thing is the Kurds, who, as far as I know, number twenty million in Turkey, and if they were to secede, Turkey would lose at least a quarter of its territory along with the population of that quarter, respectively, and this would be a big blow for any state.

The second problem, although less talked about, still makes the Turks think, because in any convenient case, the Alawites use it against them: Antakya and that adjacent territories that extend along most of the sea coast; as we know, mainly Alawites live on this territory.

Furthermore, we know that Turkey has showed great interest in overthrowing Bashar. There are also big differences between Turkey and Iran, which supports Bashar and is trying to establish

its influence. In general, the Shi'ites have started to spread their influence around the world, usurping Sunnis. Turkey is considered a Sunni state, although people of different faiths live there.

At first, I suspected that Turkey was colluding with Europe and America to implement some big plan. But today there is no doubt that Turkey is conducting an independent policy.

That was a brief description of the situation.

Now let's try to put ourselves in the shoes of the Turkish government and think about how it would be easier for them to solve these problems.

States that are led by intelligent people are always looking for powers with whom their interests coincide and with whose help they can realize their plans without relying solely on their own armies. And the Turkish government led by Erdogan is no exception.

First of all, of course, they focused on us, on the *Mujahidin* of Syria, because our political interests coincided with their interests. I think we don't need to detail the help they gave. If we organized ourselves, then we could, with the help of Allah, while solving our own problems, also solve their problems at the same time. Turkey would rid itself of the headache associated with the Shi'ites,

whose activity on Turkish borders does not bode well for the Turks. The Kurdish question, I think, we would be able to solve without bloodshed. If we took control of the rest of the territory and showed that, while if needed we could use force to solve the problem, we put our brotherhood first—since the Kurds are basically Sunni, not counting a small number of *mushriks*³⁰— and if they saw the right path, the way of the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, where the interests of all nations are respected, I think the Kurdish people would make the right decision, and then we could stand together against the Shi'ites. The problem between the Turks and the Kurds could be solved in the same way. For us this is very important, since both peoples, like I said, are Sunnis, and we must unite everyone against the imminent threat from the Shi'ites. This will be a big problem, if anyone is not aware of that fact. After all, the unbelievers of the whole world have focused on the Shi'ites in order to destroy the correct Islam, although they play at being enemies with each other.

However, through our incorrect behavior — to put it mildly — we have driven the Turks into a corner, from where they are trying to somehow escape. While we were deciding among ourselves who is a Muslim, and who is an apostate, and while we were fighting

³⁰ Polytheists

each other, starting with IS, so that each of us could establish their influence, all the while forgetting about the main enemy and isolating ourselves from foreign policy, the Turks saw how the enemy used these disagreements to start to devour everyone one by one. Aleppo, Mosul, Raqqa ... Having become disappointed in us, Turkey decided to act on its own, before everything slipped through its hands, so that it could obtain at least some benefit.

And now, as we see, they are negotiating with yesterday's enemies to solve the Kurdish question, since this is their main problem.

And I myself would like to know what their plans are for the territory they plan to keep around Azaz, and for Idlib. Of course, until the very last they will try to retain these territories by any means possible, but will they be able to?

Here I am talking about their intentions, as I know what our intentions are: to seize the whole world with our sole hope in Allah, without creating the requisite grounds.

When the Turks decided to come here, they faced the problem of whom to negotiate with. There are two forces here: Tahrir Sham and all the other groups that announced a merger. Some have power, but they do not have a political future, and others have a political future, but they do not have power. And most likely, I

think, the Turks decided to carry out their plans with those who have power, and then, having strengthened their positions, gradually move on to those who have a political future. In this way, first of all they avoid large-scale bloodshed, and secondly, through gradual pressure, they can slowly push out radical forces from here, and the rest who are forced to stay here will face the fact that they have to reconcile themselves with the current situation. In this way, they will be able to take control of this situation.

Why does Tahrir Sham have no political future? Because the world powers are playing a political game here. And in this game, you need both white and black chips. Would the unbelievers work so hard and spend so much presenting Tahrir Sham as terrorists, only to then go out and recognize them as the good guys! If Tahrir Sham wants the unbelievers to recognize them as a political force, they must unconditionally accept all the unbelievers' conditions. The Free Syrian Army can still bargain with them, since they are not yet recognized as terrorists, but not Tahrir. Here I judge purely from the political side. And whether Tahrir Sham needs this or not is another matter.

Why do I present this scenario? Of course, Turkey today is not up to dividing us into bad and good, they need everyone. First, we are weak enough to solve our and their problems; second, they

know that we are not going to argue with them, even Tahrir, unless of course the Turks themselves will force us. It would be very unwise to fight them. Probably it's not necessary to list the reasons. In addition to all these reasons we know the Hadith of the Prophet, who said, "Leave the Ethiopians alone so long as they leave you alone, and leave the Turks alone so long as they leave you alone." (Abu Daud, 4302; An-Nasai 3176).

Let's imagine that the Turks will in any case place an emphasis on Tahrir and try to go with them to the end. We must not forget that Turkey is one of the members of the world community, and it cannot disregard this, even though it will put its interests first. Otherwise, they will all simply crush the Turkish government. If the Turks even wanted to raise Islam to the world level, then they would have to travel a very long and difficult path, where they would have to maneuver between two forces: the unbelievers and Muslims—without setting themselves up against the one side and scaring the others away.

We already see that Turkey is not liked in the world. Although the Turks are negotiating with Russia today, tomorrow, when their interests diverge, Russia will first and foremost accuse Turkey of cooperation with terrorists. America will not fail to use this against Turkey at any convenient opportunity, although the presence of the Turkish army here on the whole softens the world

community's view of what is happening in the territories under our control. And it seems to me that the Turks, realizing all this, will try to change the situation on the sly, so they will not be taken out of the game under the pretext of cooperation with terrorists, although it is unlikely that they will be able to change anything. Russia through Bashar wants to strengthen its influence throughout Syria; America via the Kurds wants to retain at least some territory under its control, and they do not need a third force, like Turkey, here.

So it seems to me that Turkey has resigned itself to the fact that this territory will end up under Bashar, although, if that happens, they will try to replace Bashar. And the maximum that they can do for the people of Syria is not to let a second Aleppo or Mosul happen here because of us, the *mujahidin*, and to try to avoid a bloodbath by means of negotiations. And for themselves they will be able to negotiate favorable terms on issues related to the Kurds. Although all this is not the best scenario for them.

However, we still have the opportunity to change the course of this game if Allah wills it. But how - this is already the next question.

I would like to note here again that this is only my logical reasoning and I do not claim to be infallible. I listen with pleasure

when other brothers discuss this problem, and we should not be at odds because we see the situation differently. We will give our own opinions, and those who lead us, let them consider and take what is useful, and discard what is not. But we have the right to point out mistakes, offer solutions and express our thoughts without making *fitna*³¹, especially when we are in crisis. And this is part of Jihad.

And yet, I would like to note that it is difficult to foresee anything with this jihad. This jihad is still continuing not because of reasons that we create; if this were the case, it would have ended long ago. Here everything changes so quickly and shifts, that one cannot keep pace with events. Allah is leading this jihad, and it is unlikely that it will end so easily. If we do not create the right reasons, Allah can replace us with others, but jihad will endure until the victorious end inshallah. Therefore, I think we each need to think individually and correct our situation.

MJ: What do you think we should do to change our situation for the better?

Muslim: To treat a sick person, you first need to identify the causes of the disease. In the earlier questions, I tried to set out the main mistakes that we need to correct and I touched upon

³¹ Discord, troubles.

solutions to these problems in general terms. Now I would like to set out more concretely the first steps with which, in my opinion, we need to start.

The Almighty Allah said, "Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves." (Surah Ar-Ra'ad, Verse:11)

When the *Sahaba* were not able to capture any fortress, they stopped and began to search for the reason why Allah was not granting them victory, because they knew that victory comes from Allah. But for some reason, after losing so many years of war, we constantly dismiss everything as being for worldly reasons, forgetting about the main thing. Allah in the Quran promises us help if we are in truth. We think that we are in truth, but we think that Allah is somehow not helping us. But Allah fulfills His promises, and if we were indeed in truth, then we would feel that help in every single step, and not in isolated cases, when sincere brothers, having gone to fight a battle, see it. The Sahaba found the reason in having neglected the *siwak*, i.e. the Sunnah. Our list will probably be long, before we even get to the Sunnah.

For Allah to change our position, we need to take the first step towards meeting Him. And our first step should be elevating the

word of Allah first of all above ourselves before calling on others to do the same.

Hasan al-Basri, may Allah be pleased with him, said, "Correct people with your actions and do not correct them with your words" (Az Zuhr, p. 222).

Sheikh ul-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah said, "the book guides and the sword assists."

First of all, we must support the scholars in organizing shuras, where issues about religion can be resolved; that is, they must establish the boundaries of the Sharia within which we may act. And they must organize AN INDEPENDENT SHARIA COURT, to which everyone, primarily the *Mujahidin*, starting with the *amirs*, will each obey.

I.E., FIRST AND FOREMOST, WE NEED TO CORRECT OUR RELIGIOUS DIMENSION AND ESTABLISH JUSTICE.

It is this that will be our unification. After all, we understand that without unification it will be impossible to correct the situation. When we are united, we can correct everything else by entrusting the military to take care of the military aspect, and the experienced people who have seen much and know the tricks of

the enemies of Allah against us to take care of the political side of things.

The Almighty Allah said, "Hold fast together to the cable of Allah and be not divided." Ali Imran, 103.

This is our first step towards the satisfaction of Allah.

I caution the brothers about those who put political interests first, using the usual excuses: "Of course, according to the *Sharia* this is so, but based on our current situation, we cannot act otherwise..." and so on. We know from history that if a group under external pressure retreats from religion at least a step, then later on they needed to retreat by two and then three steps, and even more, and eventually only words remained of their religion. And all because they did not initially seize hold of Allah's cable and they themselves brought things to such a pass.

What comes to you of good is from Allah, but what comes to you of evil, [O man], is from yourself. The Women, verse 79.

And look at those who firmly held on to this cable, although their situation was even tougher than ours. When the prophet Ibrahim, peace be upon him, was thrown into the fire, Allah made the flames cool for him, so much so that he even performed a prayer inside them. When the prophet Musa, peace be upon him, was in

a desperate situation with his people, and there was a sea before them and pharaoh with his huge army behind them, Allah parted the sea for him and, allowing him and his people to pass, destroyed pharaoh and his whole army who followed them by drowning them in this sea. **If you support Allah, He will support you, Muhammad, verse 7.**

Why, if we are in truth, doubt the help of Allah? Yes, they were prophets, but in the Qur'an Allah promised help to us, using them an example. Why do we doubt this, if we are just? We need to stop deceiving ourselves. Allah is the One who keeps His promises. If there is no help from Allah, then we have no truth with us. Look at our general situation, what have we driven it to?

Let us follow Allah's verses in our deeds, and not use them for fine words for the public.

Here, of course, young people will immediately want to ask: which scholars should we trust? They say that this scholar is mistaken in this matter, another in another matter, and so on. so much "compromising evidence" has been amassed for each scholar that young people no longer know whom to trust. The enemies of Allah through the hypocrites have inflated certain mistakes of scholars and experienced people and have pushed them away from them the youth, the force on which the *ummah* rests. And we

see very clearly today what this force can do, without knowledge and experience.

I want to say to my brothers: being knowledgeable and mistaken is better than being ignorant and mistaken. He who is knowledgeable, even if he turns off the road, will be able to figure out that he is not on the road before he gets too far; but the ignorant will leave the truth without understanding where he is going. For the intelligent, Allah gave a very clear example with the Islamic State. After all, they also left, turning away from the scholars. If we trust one scholar and follow him, then maybe we will find ourselves having to wander for a long time until we reach our goal, but if the scholars unite, it will be easy to determine the truth.

I will give an example. In one meeting, in which we had scholars from different groups with us, the question of spoils of war was raised. One scholar said that in their group they do not distribute the spoils but give monthly assistance; another said that they distribute everything except large weapons; the third began to argue with them, saying that it was necessary to distribute spoils. And this dispute began to go too far. I stopped them and asked them to explain what the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, had advocated. All unanimously said that the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, took a fifth into the coffers

and distributed the rest to the Mujahideen. However, there were exceptional cases when he did not give out anything at all; and sometimes he distributed one part of the spoils but not the rest. The caliphs after him adhered to this. I asked these scholars: "If I adhere to this [practice] today, can anybody condemn me?" They said, "No." And I found an answer for myself. After all, there is a middle ground in this issue, into which ends all of the disagreements and discontent. Of course, they told me that having distributed the spoils, it would be impossible to conduct contemporary jihad. But I saw a great benefit and the wisdom of Allah in this distribution of spoils.

First, by doing the same as His Prophet *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam* and the *Sahaba*, I would obtain the satisfaction of Allah; secondly, disagreements between the scholars would be resolved; thirdly, I would alleviate the situation of the *Mujahidin*, who have but one problem in their heads: their families, who have lived in tents for so many years and who have to stretch the meager help they receive to last a whole month. Many of those who have not only participated, but also been injured, for several years in operations where a great amount of spoils was captured still cannot build their families even one room where they could leave them if they became martyrs. And fourth, if the *Mujahidin* are going to fight with their own property, they will take a more

responsible approach to it. And the funds from the *Bait ul-Mal*³² could be sent to help families of martyrs, the wounded and those who have only recently joined the Jihad. If there were to be a need, we might sometimes not distribute spoils or give out only a part, like the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, but we would not keep them on a permanent basis. There is no need to worry that, having received good money, the *Mujahidin* would disperse, because they do not give their lives for worldly goods. Yes, many would go to sort out their families, but when they have done so most of them would return. If someone did leave, then we would be joined by those who are with us in spirit, but because of their families, for whom they are obliged to provide, cannot yet join us. And do not worry that there might not be sufficient weapons for the next operation; if Allah gives *barakat*³³ then with a small amount of weapons you can do what you cannot do with a huge number of weapons. *Barakat* must be sought in justice, when scholars, experienced people, mujahedin, and the nation receive their *haqq* [right, as in human rights].

This is just one example. If we keep to this golden mean in everything, where disagreements do not arise among the scholars, then not only the Mujahideen, but the whole Ummah will

³² Common treasury

³³ blessings, good fortune

be able to unite under the will of Allah. The wisdom of Allah is great, so we need to follow the path of the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, leaving aside logical reasoning about the inconsistency of our present position with the olden times, which only leads us away from the truth. If we fall into one extreme, there necessarily will be another extreme, then there will be dissatisfaction and enmity, through which the Ummah will be divided. And we know that the grace of Allah is in unity.

Do not forget, scholars are a connection with the people both inside the country and abroad. If the ummah sees that this jihad is led by scholars, then there will be more trust and many Mujahidin and experienced people will be drawn here, and financial help will come.

After all, we have scholars who have a wealth of knowledge, although they sometimes make mistakes. And this gap can be sealed by experienced people who are well versed in worldly affairs.

O Allah, You see our position! O Allah, You see, with what hope all the Ummah looks to us! Allah, protect us from humiliation and shame! O Allah, correct us, lead us to the truth, unite us and give us victory over your and our enemies. O Allah, establish for your cause the truth and justice in Your land! O Allah, make us the

vanguard through which Your religion will spread on this earth! O Allah, grant us martyrdom on Your path and let us enter the highest level of Heaven - *Firdaws*³⁴! Amen!

Q: What general advice and instructions would you give to those who travel to Syria?

A: It is a shame that we do not have an established system of explaining to newly-arrived brothers, muhajirs, how to behave on Jihad: what must be followed; to whom one should listen; how to treat scholars and experienced people who have been on Jihad for a long time; how to behave among the Mujahideen; how to treat the people, what kind of *adat* they have, what can be done with them, what cannot be done, and so on... That is, there is no system for educational work with newcomers before they are sent out onto the field of Jihad. And at this stage one would really need to identify and not allow people who are extremists and harmful for Jihad, as did Khattab and the brothers who were with him, in Chechnya.

Unfortunately, however, there is nothing like that here.

I of course would like to explain a lot to the young people who come here and who are not tarnished by all these *fitnas*, but to

³⁴ The highest rank of Paradise in Islam. Actually, the English and Arabic words both come from an proto-Iranian source word that meant a closed or walled garden.

avoid a very long and dull conversation, I will try to note only the most important thing.

The first and most important thing to note is that they should keep their intention. Initially, when brothers go to Jihad, they are very serious and their intentions are sincere. Their main goal, as it should be, is the desire to please Allah. And in going out on this path, they rejoice that they will be among well-minded and sincere brothers with whom it will be easy to get along. But when they come here and see how things are, a lot changes over time.

The brothers must understand that even here, in Jihad, not everything is as rosy as we imagine it to be at the start. Only when I went out to Jihad did I understand the meaning of the verses where Allah singles out a "small group" among all. Indeed, that "small group," which, despite everything, holds onto this religion with its teeth; that will not be diverted from this path by any worldly temptations; and which is firm in its knowledge of what it wants from this world, is an example for other Muslims to follow; and this group consists of those who are the engine of this *ummah*. But the rest of the Muslims, when they see good examples from such brothers, are strengthened in faith, while when they are alone or with the others who are weak, they relax.

Look even at the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), was the whole *ummah* like Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali and the other outstanding companions (may Allah be pleased with them)? Of course not! And this manifested itself when the Prophet was no more, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. After his death, very few remained on the true path. The scholars give three places: Medina, Mecca and Taif. All the rest either completely turned away from Islam or abandoned some duties.

And how many false prophets appeared and how many people followed them! But the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, united them together, made them one *ummah*, attracting many with property. With these people, the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, extended the lands of Muslims. What would have happened if the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, rejected them because they smoked, drank alcohol, did *zina*³⁵, shaved their beards, did not roll up their trousers, showed weakness in worship, and so on?

Therefore, young people should understand that there are such people among the Mujahideen and they also wage Jihad. The same people were in the army of the Prophet (peace and

³⁵ Fornication

blessings of Allah be upon him) and in the armies of the Caliphs after him. But since the face of the *ummah* is its best representatives, historians always write about them. Therefore, we always hear good stories, but when they come and see the real picture of Jihad, the brothers are lost: many get disappointed and leave; many are isolated in separate groups and keep away from everyone else; others start to *takfir* everyone, setting everyone against them. And only that "small group"—those Muslims whom Allah has endowed with an understanding of the truth because of their truthfulness and sincerity—do everything to prevent this jihad from falling. They are the hope of the Muslims. Everyone, even the weakest Muslim who became a slave of his passions, in his soul is afraid of his actions and wants to rid himself of his weaknesses, and when he sees pure, sincere Muslims, he shows respect for them and tries to become like them, strengthening his faith.

Therefore, I advise the brothers: when you go out onto this path, prepare yourself for the most difficult trials, and these tests will come not from the battlefields, but from the bases where you might have to live with the very last people you want, to listen to them, eat with them, stay on *ribat* with them and sit in the trenches against the unbelievers. And you will have to obey the *Amirs*, who, maybe, you won't like either. After all, the main part

of our youth has not yet cleansed itself from *jahiliya*³⁶, although they go to Jihad. Therefore, you will have to endure many things. You need to first work on your *nafs*. After all, at home you are used to going where you want, being friends with whom you want, listening to your parents when you want - that is, you are used to complete freedom. If you started on this path and want to travel along it, striving for the contentment of Allah, you must push away your desires and put Allah's requirements first. And this is the most difficult thing. After all, *nafs*³⁷ is the worst enemy of man. It is sometimes harder to defeat it than to defeat the unbelievers.

For the brothers to understand me better, I will try to list the worst and best cases of the Mujahideen I have seen.

First, when young brothers go out to Jihad, the worst thing I've seen from them is excessive confidence that they have already achieved Allah's satisfaction and that there is only one bullet between them and Paradise. Because of this certainty, they even show weakness in worship. And they forget the Hadith where it says that in the fire of Hell there will be three categories of people,

³⁶ Ignorance, specifically the state of ignorance that persisted in Arabia before Islam. More recently, the term has been expanded to mean "secular modernity." The Egyptian thinker Sayyid Qutb interpreted the concept as meaning the rule of humans by humans instead of the submission of humans to God.

<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1157>

³⁷ Self, ego

among them the *Mujahid*. Do not forget, when you go to Jihad, you are only at the very beginning of a difficult journey that is full of the most difficult trials, and only those whom Allah helps and supports will pass these. The best among them, knowing this, are constantly afraid that they may not travel this path to the end, and you can often see how they pray to Allah on *Tahajjud*³⁸ crying to strengthen them on this path and not let them give up on it. After all, even the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) made this request!

Second, some of the brothers who embark on this path immediately begin to condemn those who stayed at home, as if they themselves had been on this path for several decades, while those that remained behind hadn't come to their senses for years and years. When [these brothers] communicate with [such people], one can only hear reproaches and insults in their what they say. How often I witnessed how some of these critics left Jihad after a while, and those they slandered embarked on this path and became martyrs. And the best always remain in touch with their friends and give them *nasiha*³⁹, in which there is not even a hint of arrogance.

³⁸ The night prayer.

³⁹ Advice, recommendation; often used in the context of giving someone advice when they have done something badly or wrong.

Never be certain that you are above others, even if you are on Jihad and they are at home, with their families. We know that Jihad is the best worship of Allah, but can we be sure that Allah will accept it from us? Have you not heard the Hadith where Allah allowed a prostitute into Paradise just because she gave a thirsty dog water from a well in her shoe? And the man who walked with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and campaigned with him, did Jihad with him, went to Hell because he took a cloak from the spoils [of war] without permission.

Third: how many brothers, in going to fight against evil, without realizing it, spread the same evil themselves, putting about all sorts of unpleasant rumors that are started by hypocrites and employees of the unbelievers' special services about the scholars and the experienced, respected people of Jihad. Did you not read the *Hadith* about the *ayat* that Allah revealed about the hypocrites who mocked the reciters of the Quran? When you tell the scandalmongering brothers this, of course they find themselves excuses for themselves, saying that they aren't mocking but that they are telling the truth, that they do not want those people to mislead the brothers and so on. They act as if they are worried about the *Ummah* and are protecting religion from distortion. But if

you look at them, you will not find that they have any knowledge or experience.

Do not forget, brothers, the truth has come to us because of the scholars. If scholar makes a mistake, another scholar corrects it, not a *Jahil*⁴⁰, who may have studied for several years, but does not know how to apply his knowledge in practice, and often he himself is mistaken and earns even more sin by leading other brothers astray. At the very least, be afraid that if you cast aspersions on a scholar, you might fall into the category of those about which that *ayat* was revealed⁴¹. The best among us always avoided meetings where they made *ghibah*⁴², maintained ties with scholars and old Mujahidin and always liked to listen to their stories. After all, such people mainly tell instructive stories, and if there were unclear questions, the best of us immediately addressed them and always protected them from slander. If you ask the slanderers, who paint everyone black, ask: "Before slandering someone, why do not you consult with knowledgeable people?" you can hear in response: "Where are they?" Most often this is because of their overconfidence and arrogance, they are do not bother with scholars, and if you name someone, they either

⁴⁰ Someone adhering to the state of jahiliyya, see previous footnote

⁴¹ <https://quran.com/9/65-66> And if you ask them, they will surely say, "We were only conversing and playing." Say, "Is it Allah and His verses and His Messenger that you were mocking?" The Hadith is referred to here: <https://islamqa.info/en/12930>

⁴² Backbiting

already have dirt on that person or they say that they do not know him and therefore cannot trust him.

If we want to learn how to build a house, repair a car, or treat a sick person, then where do we start? An arrogant and overconfident person, of course, will try to do this on his own and, before he figures it out, will destroy a lot of assets. A reasonable person will seek knowledgeable people and learn from them. They would practice with them before taking on the task themselves.

I advise the brothers thus: look to the senior, experienced people, consult and talk more with them. They can tell you a lot of things, as they have seen a great deal. Whatever they tell you, you always learn the truth, even if you do not know the person himself. Allah originally gave us the ability to recognize pure truth. But experienced and knowledgeable people who have seen a great deal [in life] are able to separate it from various impurities. Therefore, you will always learn the truth from them.

Fourth: one often hears such conversations from the brothers: "Why should I do the cleaning, but he does not?! Why should I obey the *amir* in this, if he does not obey him?" They often take things that are not theirs, saying: "It belongs to the jamaat," and

so on. Even though these people have heard the *hadith* about how to obey the *amir*, the *hadith* about severe punishments for disobeying him or for taking things without asking or stealing, even if such acts were committed by those waging Jihad. Worse, often the brothers refuse to go to the *ribat*, saying: "Why should I go, when he does not go?!" – all while reading *hadith* and *ayat* about the dignity of the *ribat*.

Truly, these are extraordinary conversations for those who say that they came to give their lives for the sake of Allah's pleasure, renouncing everything that was dear to them.

If the intentions of these brothers were in accordance with their words, they would not take an example from the worst people and would not do things that are contrary to Allah's demands, but would adhere to those from the "small group" and strive ahead, for the satisfaction of Allah, without paying attention to anyone. When the best of us see something wrong or in a mess, they do not need to say anything, they will fix everything and put things in order without orders from the *amir*. You will always find these people on the bases, busy attending to the needs of the brothers, while others spend time on the Internet, looking at all sorts of useless things, or in idle chatter.

They cook for the brothers, wash the dishes, do the cleaning, even if it is not their turn. If they have to go to work, to a *ribat* or somewhere else, then you'll always see them in the front lines. When others complain about everything, often completely groundlessly, blaming everyone else, you will never hear these brothers complain even on serious matters. If they do speak, they talk about things that could improve matters for the brothers, and they themselves will put up with even the worst. From the first lot, you will always hear reproaches and discontent, while they themselves do not fulfill their obligations. However, the second group do not say much, but they do a great deal, and when you ask them about things, there is always a smile on their faces, and praise for Allah in their words.

Fifth: I saw those who were lions when they were among the brothers at the bases, refusing to forgive the brothers for even small mistakes, but when times became tough, they panicked. And the best people, who kept their heads down at the bases, behaved so coolly and confidently during the most tough times, when even strong brothers were overwhelmed, that the thought involuntarily arose that they did not realize what was going on around them. But when they began to make *nasiha*, morally supporting the Mujahidin, we felt bad because of the weakness

we showed, and, gathering our spirits, we easily got out of the difficult situation.

These people, even at times when everyone begins to doubt, steadfastly follow their chosen path, because they completely trust the promise of Allah; and because of their steadfastness, others are also strengthened. These people never forget the Prophet's instructions, may Allah bless him and grant him peace:

Be mindful of Allah and he will protect you. Be mindful of Allah and you will find him before you. If you ask, ask from Allah. If you seek help, seek help from Allah. Know that if the nations gathered together to benefit you, they will not benefit you unless Allah has decreed it for you. And if the nations gathered together to harm you, they will not harm you unless Allah has decreed it for you. The pens have been lifted and the pages have dried. At Tirmidhi.

Sixth: many brothers have abandoned and are abandoning this jihad because of the fact that there is *fitna* here, that there are many disagreements and injustices among the brothers. These people are among those who have not yet fully understood their religion. Just think, what is the essence of Jihad? It is to establish justice where there is no justice. It does not matter from whom

this *zul'm*⁴³ comes. What would happen if all the sincere [people] were to abandon Jihad because of this injustice, even if it spread among the Mujahidin? To whom would we leave the Muslims who live on these lands and who are expecting us to help? When did it happen that the Mujahideen ran away from difficulties?

In places where all is well, and the brothers are coping with the *zulm*, like in Afghanistan, for example, maybe they do not really need us; we on the contrary, must hurry to places from which other people run away because of difficulties, so that having united with other sincere people, we can fix the situation.

Worse, when such brothers leave here they return to Europe or other unbeliever countries instead of joining the Mujahidin somewhere else⁴⁴. They think that they left the *fitna*. I think they have absolutely no idea what *fitna* is. Otherwise, how can you compare *fitna* on Jihad and *fitna* in the countries of the unbelievers, where you have to live according to their invented laws and raise children under their system? Do not deceive yourself, brothers! If we are sincere before Allah, then when needed, Allah will show us the way out. In the meantime, by uniting, we must do everything possible to rectify this situation.

⁴³ ظلم, tyranny, cruelty

I could have continued with this list for a very long time, but I think I have brought enough for sincere and reasonable brothers to draw conclusions and choose their own paths. Be for the *Ummah* those of the *Sahaba* who are an example for us even after a thousand years have passed and who will continue to do so until the Day of Judgment. This is in your power. You often hear stories about brothers who were role models, about how beautifully their life journeys ended, and how even after death they continue to be an example and moral rock for the brothers who remain. There were brothers whom Allah, in the last days before their martyrdom, revealed to them in a dream their place in Paradise and they hastened to meet with their Lord, saying farewell to their brothers and begging them for forgiveness.

And now having finished answering questions, I hope that the brothers will at least benefit from all this conversation. And I ask Allah that He strengthen us in His path, that he grant us proper understanding of religion and rectify our situation in *Sham*⁴⁵, and throughout the world. And May Allah grant that the next time we write about the situation of the Mujahideen, we will have joyous news for our *Ummah* as a whole.

⁴⁵ Syria

And in conclusion we give praise to Allah.

Muhammad Jazira, the Blessed Land of *Sham*, **1439/2017**.

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